Michèle Fabien

# JOCASTA

Translated from the French by **Richard Miller**

**MICHÈLE FABIEN** was born in Genk and educated at the University of Liège, where she received a doctorate in philosophy and literature. Since 1974, she has been the dramaturg of the Ensemble Théâtral Mobile, under the artistic direction of Marc Liebens. She has worked on productions of Marivaux, Louvet, Müller, Kalisky and Pasolini and adapted works by Ibsen, Pierre Mertens, Thomas Bernhard, Marguerite Duras and Christa Wolf. Her first play, *Notre Sade* (1978) was premiered by the Ensemble Théâtral Mobile in Brussels and published by *Didascalies* in 1985. It received the "Prix triennal de littérature dramatique" in 1987. *Jocasta* (1981) was also premiered by the Ensemble Théâtral Mobile and published by *Didascalies*; it was subsequently produced at the Petit-Odéon in Paris and at the Haagse Comedie in The Hague. *Sara Z.* (1982) was given a public reading at Théâtre Ouvert in Paris. *Tausk* (1985), for which she received a grant from the Centre National des Lettres, was produced in Mons in 1987 and published the same year by Actes Sud-Papiers. Michèle Fabien's most recent play is *Atget et Bérénice* (1988). She has also translated *Affabulazione* by Pier Paolo Pasolini and published many scholarly articles on theater.

**RICHARD MILLER** has translated numerous literary works, fiction and nonfiction, including several books by Brassaï and Roland Barthes. He has translated three other plays published by Ubu Repertory Theater: Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest,* Reine Bartève's *A Man With Women* and Sony Lab'ou Tansi's *The Second Ark,* included in the anthology *Afrique.* His most recent translation is *The Function,* a play by Jean-Marie Besset.

## I. Jocasta The Hanged

*(Jocasta speaks for the first time... When she addresses anyone, it is the musician; she does not know him, but she seems to appeal to him, whereas he has been present, from the beginning... He does not speak, only makes music.)*

My name is Jocasta.

Look at me.

Not a queen, not a widow, not a wife, not a mother.

They call her a suicide, this vile female who died soiled and alone,
her body unsought for by the eyes of the court, the seers, the shepherds and the messengers. Made transparent through horror.

Silent...
Listen...the faintest echo, so far away...
"I'll relate the horror of what happened, you didn't see it. But you shall know whatever I can remember, how she suffered. Driven mad with horror, she ran to the nuptial bed, tearing at her hair. She enters, slamming the doors behind her, she calls out to Laius, the dead king, her first husband: she remembers the past, the child he gave her and by whom he was to die, her own children from her patricidal son. She moans as she writhes in misery on the bed where she gave birth to a husband by her husband, to the children of her child.

Afterwards... I don't know how she died, for Oedipus came howling out, and then no one had eyes for anyone but he."

Transparent through horror? No. Through the appearance of the King, the Husband, the Son...

Now, ask her your question.
Ask, ask me about the sash, the laces, the beam in the ceiling, the scream of the hanged woman, the saliva flowing from her mouth, her staring eyes finally open to the true vacancy of death, the only meaningful vacancy, her blue deformed face, her lolling tongue, useless, absolutely useless, at last!
Ask! Today, Jocasta can answer.

Granite.

I am not frightened by your silence. You know it: Oedipus entered, ravaged, mad, here, where I must be alone and die.

His mouth shapes a cry that only I, his mother, can hear. The king's face is one no one could recognize, the empty sockets I was the only one to glimpse, the only one to whom he ever showed them. No one knows.
Take my brooch, shrink down, become very small; then gouge out your eyes, it is written.

Hear me, Oedipus, your mother speaks:

> "Oedipus tears the sharp golden brooch from the burial garments and lifts them to his eyelids, he plunges them into his eyeballs. And he shouts that his eyes will never again look upon his mother, never again gaze upon his crime, that they will see no more those whom they should not have seen. Again he cried those words, striking his cheeks. And the blood of his eyes flowed down his face in a dark stream, like clotted drops of a dark rain."

Narrative.

Your mother speaks to you.
Yes, Oedipus, take my brooch, gouge out your eyes. . .
And what could you still look at? Your plague-ravaged country? Your incestuous wife? Your mother, the mother of your children? What is left for you?

Gouge your eyes and then flee, howl and then go.

No motion.
He staggers, crumbles, goes.

At last his rending scream echoes through the vast white palace.
Howl, Oedipus, howl Blindman, howl. It will help.

He is gone, my womb tightens.

You, come closer, listen to me, I am Jocasta, I am speaking.
The road here has seemed so long, the path so difficult, and yet I feel no pain.

Standing...
Motionless...
I touch my face and it is a stranger to my hands.
Who is Jocasta?
I feel no pain.
Another step towards the mirror, towards the dagger...

Listen! Oedipus is still at last! Silence. We are
alone, all alone, you alone will hear Jocasta's
harsh sighs.

Who is Jocasta?

Ask! Must I too make an end?
Yes...
Later...
Wait...
You know, and I know too: I am here for that.

I was Queen, still young, still beautiful. Adored, worshipped.
Thebes was good to him...
And then I became his mother...

No, no!
I'm still Jocasta, your Queen, spouse of your King,
the hero who governs the city, the man who confronted
the Sphinx, and won, and delivered you...

And now a long wall of ice, of the forgotten past,
has cut me off from everyone who. . .
The court, the seers, the shepherds, the messengers, the chorus, their leader. . .
I too have turned to ice, but they do not see it.
For help, for love, I call out to my son, my husband, the seer, the shepherds, the messengers, the leaders, the people of Thebes, but my cries do not penetrate their deaf ears, saturated with horrors.
They roll their eyes in terror, only the whites show through the half-shut lids.

What is left for them to see?
Their King, their hero, their savior, is now the
incestuous son, the murderer of his father, Laius, and
their queen has become her son's wife.
Don't look away, do not avert your eyes, not you too.

Transparent because unbearable?
Easy to say!
I shall seek out Jocasta, who is nothing but her name.
Wrong! She is not far, Jocasta, she is here, very near.

My hair, so often stroked.
My cheeks, flushed with desire.
My arms, that embraced Laius so tightly.
My hands, that caressed his thighs.
My breasts, taut with desire for his body
My womb, which bore my son's children.
My thighs, spread wide to welcome my son's body.
You see, it can be said, can't it?
I'm tired.
A wall of glacial cold and forgotten past separates me from the living, the unknowing.

Tell me what you expect of me.
Do you want something of me?
I know: Jocasta must kill herself. That is why she is here.
Jocasta is guilty, isn't she?

I look at myself in the mirror.
I pick up the dagger.
I shall kill the young bride of the great Laius, King of Thebes.

I shall kill the queen of Thebes.
I shall kill the mother who had Oedipus exposed.
I shall kill the Queen who made him King and father of his sisters, his brothers.
I look at myself in the mirror and I see a face
I do not know, a new body, never seen before.
I press the glittering blade against
that unknown breast.
The point grazes the material. It is unbearable.
I am blinded by a reflection in the mirror. I raise the dagger to the neck, the mouth, the eyes.
I seek my image in the mirror. My body
grows tense, my fist tightens, it breaks the mirror.
There is blood on the shattered fragments of glass.

## II. Jocasta's Plague

I don't want blood.
No blood . . . no red.

Thebes is a white city, bleached by the sun, and I too . . .

I am in pain.

Thebes is blackened by the sun. I too.
My womb tenses . . .
And now it lets go.
And I can no longer control my body, it is
getting away from me.
Vomit . . . spew up the terror, the horror.

It is not me!
I am not sick!
Not yet. I am the queen. I kill myself, I
am white, I am beautiful.

Leave...
I must leave, alone, you see.
Not to meet Laius, or Oedipus.
Is there a land where the dead do not meet?
My children...

No, here I can do no more.
I vomit, I spit, I gag and spew. It all comes up.
All what?
Oh, let the horror twined and boiling in my hollow guts, let all this aching horror gush forth.

Bloodsucker!
The Thebans must not rot.
So, rip out this plague that's rooted in my womb.

Sun. Heat. Cadavers.

Morning, noon and night, the same rasping voice, the toothless old man: "Bring out your dead, bring out your dead... I will relieve you of your corpses. I'll take your stiffs..."

The cart goes by with its pile of bodies, more
every minute. Gutted, bursting, black,
stinking. And the sound of the hammers striking the doors
as they are boarded up.
Houses shut, blinded, forever and ever.

But I see, I live.
They expect Jocasta to...

What?
Now, they wait for her to kill herself.
Who?
You?

Sun. Heat. Cadavers.
I go out into the street.
Jocasta is white, still beautiful. Her skin is soft and smooth, translucent. So lovely that she is transparent.
Jocasta is the queen of Thebes.
Was.
Piles of fallen children lie in the street, cut down by an inescapable disease. Rats swarm beneath their plague-stricken bodies.
Piles of children, fallen together in heaps to breathe no more. Impossible to know their fright, their suffering!
A woman in torn robes, her arms outstretched, her legs open, unconsciously offers her gaping sex, which oozes greenish black blood. The rattling sound of death comes from her throat, no one to witness her last breath. She, like the rest, will go on the cart. Until there is no one left to collect the dead. Then... Then...
A man reaches out to me. His mouth is a rotting cavity. He looks at me through swollen eyes. I can hear the gurgling of his stinking guts. Our eyes meet. I am watching for something and I don't know what it is.
"Save me," he says.

Impossible.
Fascinated, Jocasta watches, takes a deep breath. She drinks in the plague.

Nausea rises through her body to her mouth. I gag. My body tenses. I'm not afraid. I stay there watching the dead for hours. They no longer expect anything of me.

The city is a vast boil about to burst. And Jocasta is its core. I wait to burst myself. For my flesh to be covered with pustules, tiny poisonous craters that will leave me scarred forever.
Finally, Jocasta will no longer be alone.

I rub up against the temple columns spattered with blood and pus. My sullied robes catch on the rough stone.
Let the plague enter me! Let it rise in my veins and
erode me from within. Enough of the noise surrounding me, sounds heavy with vomiting.

They pray as they expire!

Wait for me!
Let me lie down first, on the bottom of the cart,
Let me feel the rough wood of the planking against my back. Splinters scratch against my shoulderblades. Then a heavy body, a shock, a corpse falls, then another, they pile up, one
atop the other, on me, on me alone, witness of their dying moments. I smother, I gag, underneath the vomiting, the excrement, the sweat.

I take note of every smell, I shut my eyes, I am dead.

No.

I live.

## III. Jocasta: Primal Scene and Revelation

Don't bandy words! Don't babble on!
Above all...
Don't...

Kill oneself then? I know: there are words that kill. No, not words, the images words make, become
contorted pictures, like ghouls that
will attach themselves to anyone, infiltrating
their brains, their guts, twisting them with pain and horror and then terror.
That kills.

I alone remain untouched: no image for Jocasta,
Jocasta is Jocasta and has no image, only the
glittering hints of murder in the eyes of all who meet her.

Drop the name, erase it, cross it out, rub it away... What
is left is Oedipus' mother... Mother of Abomination.

The silence is stifling me...
Deliver me from the suffering of Oedipus, who bears all
the sorrows of Thebes. My hand can no longer relieve it. In
the morning when he awakens he has forgotten his dreams.
Deliver me from myself, I have no reason to die.
Alas, that is not enough to live for.

Let's start again.

The great square of Thebes, before the Palace of the Labdacides, it's white, blazing in the sun. The stench of rotting bodies decomposing does not reach here from the other side of town. The plague does not prowl here.
Everyone is present: priests, seers, the chorus, the chorus-leader, and, of course, the King, Oedipus: purple and gold, crowned because he vanquished the Sphinx, and to whom everyone turns again today, seeking salvation.
Let the King's power be shown!

Music!

It's worth the trouble, for a major solution...
Then Creon will come, he went to consult the oracle on
orders from King Oedipus, and his mouth will transmit the words
of the god. The plague is a curse! Everyone says so.

Not I.

Everyone was there, waiting in their finery, including
Tiresias, the dazzling blind man—no need for him to
await Creon's return. But he too, like me, was pretending to believe
that the plague is a curse.

So everyone was there, even the shepherds, even old forgotten servants.

If only Creon did not return! If only he could die at the crossroads,
attacked by young ruffians, if only his chariot could overturn,
if only a stranger could taunt him and refuse to give way to him,
if only they were to draw their swords and Creon were to die,
his mouth forever closed,
if only the plague could finally become an illness.
Thebes would be burned, purified by fire.

No crossroads, no foreigner, no aggressor, no death.

A journey without problems. A radiant expression, a relaxed smile,
a clear, well-placed voice... Listen, Jocasta, hear your brother,
the royal prince, nothing prevents you from killing yourself.

Let's start again.
The ceremony: sunlit red carpet, king, gold, feverish
expectation, burning eyes; and Creon, his figure visible
at a great distance away, first on the horizon, on the dusty
road. He draws near and speaks. A calm, clear voice, et cetera.

"Phoebus unequivocally orders us to rid our land of the stain it harbors."

If I shut my eyes I can hear the city
pulsating with the breathing of Oedipus,
within my breast.

"If we allow the stain to spread it will become incurable."

Silence, Creon, lest death breed death. Isn't
the plague enough? Aren't there already enough cadavers
in Thebes? No...no dam can retain his speech.

"The murderers must be banished, murder must be
met with murder, for the city's fever is caused
by spilt blood."

Silence, Creon—it is the rats.
But still his words gush forth:

"Laius ruled this land. One day he was slain and now
the god has clearly ordained us to punish his murderers."

A mouth contorts, but no sound comes forth: my mouth.
What is Jocasta doing? It is up to her to save the city.
She is the widow of the slain Laius.

Come then, slay me.
Kill me and then tell, tell all, speak the words
with which it all began. Tell that the murderer is Oedipus,
that his mother is Jocasta. Without Jocasta, no Oedipus...
Say that she did not intend the plague, profanation,
Say that one day she gave birth to this son and that later
she welcomed him, the same son, into her womb again.
Kill me, I will resist you, because I will have nothing
to do with such an obscure death. She did not commit
suicide, the guilty Jocasta, she was executed.

Yes. You sit up and look at me. Execution. I can
read it in your eyes. Guilty, bearer of plague and shit,
the bearer of a monster child and of the monster's children.

Yes, come, draw near, let your shoulders tremble with
rage, let your breath grow short and harsh, let me feel it in my
neck, in my mouth, let your shoulders shut out the sky—let them
shut out *my* sky.
Yes, you are big, strong, but I too am strong.
I watch you and I tell you that you may swear but that you know
nothing.
Your hands reach out to me, you seize me, I twist away, I
shake off your hands, my smooth skin slips from your fingers.
I bite your arm, you cry out, hurt, yes, that's right,
don't go, come back. Nothing's over yet, nothing's settled.
Come closer, you're suffering, it's hard.
You can't find the words to express it, your loathing, and I
am afraid. I am frightened to death. I can see my death in
your eyes, your hands tighten around my neck. You sweat,
your face hardens, your eyes narrow. Look at me, don't
shut your eyes. Don't try to reject the mother's body,

she is dying. I shall writhe in pain, strangled by your own hands, your own extremities. They are yours, those hands strangling your mother, Jocasta. I scream that to you, but you do not hear, you no longer see, your eyes stare away, elsewhere, you do not want to see me a corpse, you release me, I fall to the ground and you leave.
You were unable to kill me, I still live, and your rage is not even appeased. Your rage?
So, must I die by my own hand?

But it's still too early for that. So far, no one knows the murderer's name. And first there must be an inquiry. Questions must be asked. Go on, say something. If you don't ask any questions, how will you ever learn?

Oedipus has taken his hand from my shoulder. He speaks to the people,
his people, to the city I gave him, which Creon gave him when he gave me to him, which the Sphinx allowed him to have.

No, you will not learn the murderer's name. I know nothing. It's up to you to discover it. And above all, don't think that the plague is a disease, it's a punishment. If murder was done, then someone must have done it. If the gods command you to seek him out, it's because he can be found. If he is to be banished from our land, it's because he is still here.
All that is obvious!

Seek out the killer. Walk, crawl, open your eyes, your ears, your nostrils, search the ground with your bare hands for some clue, a bit of bone, a twig once reddened and now black with the blood of the victim—or of his killer.
Stones bear no scars.
Look further. Call together your friends, your enemies, the people of Thebes; section off the ground, encircle it, dig, surround the place...
Ask them what they've heard, seen, touched, smelled...
What they've forgotten, what they've refused to see, to feel, to hear.

Promise them bread, wine, money, and their memories
will return, like a vast river of horror, pus,
shit, piss and sweat, and then you will flee
because you will be unable to dam the gigantic flow of shit
flooding down upon you, threatening to cover you, to bury you.

I shall watch you bathing in the juices, at my feet
caught up in the horror you yourself brought on
when you opened the floodgates, the horror from which you will
never escape.
May the fluids from bodies too closely packed
flow over you.

No. Never fear, everything will be all right. Just speak,
question. They're only looking for a word, a name...
Didn't Oedpius himself, armed only with his brains,
drive away the Sphinx that had been ravaging Thebes?
It's been done before, why not again? Never fear, words
are clean, neat, sterilized, pared down, smooth...

There's always some old forgotten servant who's seen the whole thing,
heard it all, and who has said nothing. And then tells it all. It's
a mystery how one day he just turns up, you realize that he's always
been there. Yet no one has sent for him.
No one has asked him about anything, promised him anything, but
still he emerges from the devastated wastelands around the city,
and when he begins to speak
no one can stop him.
The story is beautiful, so wondrous...

Polybus could not have a child by Merope, but he wanted one.
A shepherd meets another shepherd, who is carrying a baby,
having crossed mountains and plains, who comes from far far away,
so tired, so hungry, and the baby begins to cry. His feet are
swollen, he is brought to court, he will be a king's son, if
he is not one already, or perhaps even the king himself, why not?
Three happy people.

When will the celebration be? The celebration for the plague's

end. For
the mystery will be solved. One guilty person, one exile, and then purification.
A wreath of dried flowers on the lacquered coffin:
"To Oedipus, twice our savior, from the grateful people of Thebes."
A crown of rare pearls on a bed of red velvet:
"To Jocasta, who bore Oedipus our savior, from the grateful people of Thebes."

How ridiculous it is!. . . Let her die. But she must die
alone. She must not disembowel herself in public.
It would be indecent, there has been enough horror. We must not wallow in filth.

Who mentioned filth?

The deliverance of Thebes will happen without Jocasta, outside of her—Jocasta outside the walls, outside of love, outside the law.

## IV. The Enigma of Jocasta

Who are you?
Where is everyone? The choir, the court, et cetera. . .
Where is my celebration? Jocasta's celebration? The wife of your king, the mother of your king.
Don't go. . . He'll find your killer for you.
Trust him. He said he would search, and search he will,
and he will not only search. He will find. Ask
Tiresias, he knows, he knows Oedipus can do anything. Anything!
Or ask me, I know him so well. And, of course. . .
it isn't the first time.

Why don't you say something? What do you want? What do you want from me?
Jocasta. . . You stay here with Jocasta. . . Why?

Come here, closer to me. I see you are not
afraid, I see you look into my eyes,
I can sense that you are proud, and fated for great things. Yes, you're
young, handsome.
I know it, I see it, I feel it.
You like hearing someone say it, don't you?
Do you speak my tongue?
Do you understand my words?
Of course he understands my words. He's listening,
isn't he?

Come then, come into my arms, into my body, you can;
this isn't a body, I'm not a woman. Don't let your eyes mislead you.
Close them, forget that I look like your mother. Close your eyes.
Don't cover your innocent member with your hand. I have no
breasts, no long hair, no smooth damp skin, no sex. Don't speak.
There's nothing for you to say, yet. And I—I am only a voice, you
must just let it flow inside you. There, that's fine, now
don't come any closer, don't touch me.
You have no body either, no hands, no beard, no sex. I'm
speaking only to your ear. . .
The one that knows, the one that has already heard so many
difficult things.

Tell me. Tell me now, tell me the unbearable prophecy.

"Phoebus said I would slay my father
and wed my mother."

Impossible, isn't it? Utterly impossible. Such awful things should
not be uttered, too horrible.
But if one *does* hear them, they must never be
forgotten, quite the contrary, one must remember them, one must act
accordingly.

It's so impossible that one must act as if it *were* possible, as if
the oracle were right, as if it had spoken the truth,
even if one knows it's a lie, because one *does* know it is a lie,
even if one is the only one to know.

Everyone knows that one loves one's father and one's mother and that one doesn't want to kill them, or to marry them.

One only wants to live, to live and let live,
so since there's nothing to fear, not even the all-powerful oracle,
one just decides to defy it, because one wants to be a
man, a real man, not a murderer, not a... there isn't even
a word to describe such awfulness. And since one *has* decided,
go. One can be sure that if the oracle *had* spoken the truth
one could always make it out to be false.
And, of course, it *is* possible. So go, don't hesitate,
because one is a man of decision, firm, irrevocable.
Farewell Polybus, farewell Merope, farewell to you whom I have always called "Father," "Mother," and farewell Corinth, my city because I have always lived there, for as long as I can remember, farewell to my roots, to which I have no desire to return,
I'm leaving, I'm going away and taking the other road, the opposite road, in order to make sure
I'm not trapped into doubling back. Off to the ends of the earth.
I shall not ward off the oracle, I shall forestall it.
Because I know, I know everything, I know what
must be done.

No. Don't open your eyes.

And so your decision led you to me. Don't ask
who I am. I have no name, and it's not important.
Indeed, I've already told you, I'm not a
woman, I'm not your mother. Your name is Oedipus,
that's all, and you will answer my question because
you have heard about a monster who is killing young
people at the gates of a city called Thebes, a city
you don't know because you've never set foot in it,
and you're sure about that, too, and because you've heard
that the city is in trouble, because for the first time
in your life you feel needed, because you believe that if
this city is on your way it must be for a reason and that there must be something that can be done to save the suffering
people, and that now, now that you have decided and

made your choice, you feel yourself so strong. Just the answer
to one question, and the city is saved, the young people
will no longer die, the mothers will no longer weep, and the
person who answers the question will be
king, for there's a throne to take, too, and a queen,
a queen who awaits the victor and who will be his wife,
and the queen is very beautiful and you too are beautiful
and today you feel free and prepared to be the man for
whom the city waits and for whom you wait as well,
because there comes a moment in one's life, and you know this,
you've always known it, when you must cease to be a boy,
even if you must walk a straight line along a straight path,
you must...

"What walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon and on three
in the evening?"

—"Man," cries the man, giving voice to what he wants.
The Sphinx falls dead.

I'm cold.
Why am I now alone?
Oedipus the man will not even glance down at the corpse.
I know, because, he told me, she was a monster, she knew who she was,
because she herself had told him, that she was not a woman, and
therefore it was not hard to guess that she was a monster and
that that was what she called herself all the time she was speaking
to him
or to herself, rather, since he stood with his eyes shut all that
time,
why then should he open them at the moment of
horror.

Poor fool!

It was fine, it was wonderful, it was great!
You had something to do, and you did it, boldly.
So think: walking until your body drops
along the path you have chosen for yourself because

one day you have another goal in life than being
what you were fated to be—that is, a King's son, then a King.
Turn the oracle back upon itself!
Prove to the god that he has made a mistake!

Couldn't you have thought of something else?
Couldn't you have taken another road, less straight,
less opposite, or two, or even three?
Couldn't you have made wings and flown?
Not listened to the Sphinx, or taken her
in your arms?
Refused to answer? Loved her? Perhaps she had
suffered so much that she wanted to die.
But you didn't look back, not even on her corpse...
What if it was still there?
But Oedipus does not question...not yet.

I'm cold.
There is no fateful crossroads, no Sphinx,
there is no plague in Thebes, and I love Oedipus.
My hand softly caressing your back, your nipples...

No! There *is* plague, and after seventeen years
it's all beginning again!
And there's death, and suffering, and a smell
spreads everywhere, even into the palace when the weather turns hot.
And there's Thebes crying out for its king, restless, nerves on edge,
suffering and fearful, calling out after seventeen years.
Seventeen years of a just and clement reign.

"It's the plague, the people call me, something must be done."
Oedipus leaves Jocasta's bed, he dons his kingly robes,
he orders the Oracle be consulted, Creon returns with the message,
with words.

But words don't bleed. Then Oedipus rises,
Oedipus sets to work, he seeks. Will he finally
seek his mother?

My eyes hurt. . .the light. . .
Oedipus does not seek his mother, Oedipus seeks himself,
Oedipus finds himself. The poison is burning in my bowels,
the blade whispers across my throat, the cords bruise my neck.
Jocasta kills herself.

You walk straight ahead. You know what you're leaving
behind. You don't know me. But then, here, in
this foreign land, you don't know anyone, not even yourself.
You walk on. You only know that you don't want what you know,
and that keeps you going. You will come to me.
You are so tired you stagger, but you keep on, there
is no other will than yours. A man appears and
bars your path, you kill him. There will be no other body
than yours. There will be no other king than you. You will
have no woman but me.

I did not allow desire to dwell between us.
Weep, Jocasta.
Today, it seems so easy to speak, to weep.
Perhaps because they are the same thing.

Before. . .your body strained at the crossing of the three roads,
there, where you slew Laius. Your body too, strained towards me. . .
There
must be some connection. . .
What are we unable to escape from?

I escaped from all of it, of necessity, since I was not there, or
barely. Thus, today, I feel no pain, or so
very little. . .
I recognized myself in Oedipus because he was my son,
and what have I today? You?

## V. Theater Utopia

Why is it so easy to speak? Here, and to you?
Maybe because you aren't listening to me, so that
what I say won't go any further. But is that
what I really want? Or is it because you *are*
listening, and my words are actually
unimportant. But that's not what I want either.
I don't want to speak into a vacuum, I want my words
to hang there, somewhere, between us, so that we—
either you or I—can unhook them, take them down
when we feel like it, or if it becomes necessary.
In the meantime, we can easily let them
hang there around us, let them enclose us, let them
create an intimate place where we are safe from
plague and death, fragile but rich withal, here in
this special moment.

What did I know of Oedipus? That he had come from far away,
that he had traveled many miles to get to me and that two
deaths had already marked his path. I was determined not
to be the third. That is all. I had been promised him,
as had the throne of Thebes, my only option was to
close my eyes, to sleep. By me Oedipus was given life,
first, and power, next. . .and then I had nothing more
to give him but my peace, my calm, a contentment from which
he tore himself each morning and to which he returned each night—
for seventeen years. Seventeen years, each one alike,
after the Sphinx, and prior to the plague.

On the other hand, I know nothing about you. And I shall
ask nothing. No questions, no answers.
Nor shall you know anything of me. Indeed, perhaps
there's nothing *to* know. What could my name tell you? Not
my past, although I am well aware that you can't believe
I have ever had any being away from your gaze, prior to
your arrival.

Today, I have forgotten it all. Including the cadavers,

one of which lies rotting there in the sun. You're afraid
because you don't know me, but I am not afraid. I don't know
why I have no fear. I only know that I am not afraid, that's all.
It is enough.
As a matter of fact, the reason for my lack of fear
doesn't concern you, that question should not
concern you.

The trembling in my body has nothing to do with fear.
You can watch me if you like. I think it must be
desire, because I am imagining your body and thinking
I'd like to caress it. But we're never sure about
our desires, are we, or at least never about what
they may lead to. . . I think I'd like to see you naked,
feel your skin next to mine. Yes, I would like to
feel your warmth, your gentleness,
I would like to look closely into your eyes, lashes to lashes.
You, just you, alone with yourself and with me, away
from the world outside.

You would be new for me and I would be new for
you. In a little while the sounds of the festival that
has brought us here will fade away. Then you will be nameless,
without function, and mine too will have disappeared. We
will expect nothing from each other but to try, for a while,
to stave off death. And so each time it all begins again,
from the beginning for a limited span.

Then I see myself in Jocasta's room, knowing nothing,
nothing about you, nothing about myself, but this: that
we are promised, one to the other, because we have met here,
and because I am queen, and because, tomorrow, you will have
power in Thebes, which badly needs a new king. I can give you
everything, even if you don't know it.

I see our bodies finding pleasure together, and when I
await you, lying naked on my bed, all my senses will vibrate
with desire, like yours.
We will be two bodies, and those bodies will be

one, will meet in recognition: smooth skin, soft down, tender,
sweet, and the shared secret will remain unspoken, for
nothing will be said, not even that it's good, together,
for we must only know it, we must never say it, perhaps
we already know it now, and so we must be silent, from now on.

I will pretend that I did not know you are afraid.
Perhaps I don't?
And then there will no longer be any difference between
tender and brutal, it will all be warm sweaty stickiness
and when you enter me knowing nothing of me,
excepting maybe, since there's no way of keeping it from you,
that I am queen, but you'll manage—I think, I hope—to forget that
quickly, because there will be so many other things between us
that are ours alone. . . As I was saying, when you enter into my body
my body will also seek yours, belly to belly, will rise up to meet
you,
and we will hang motionless in astonishment at where we are,
wanting to stay there.

Bodies suspended to let desire grow taut,
as if trying still to separate the two kinds of flesh,
for one of us is still, no doubt, afraid of being swallowed up,
and the other, still, reluctant to enfold. Above all,
we must not vanish utterly, not you in me, nor I in you.
We must each *be,* apart, so that we, each one,
may enjoy each other's mystery. Enjoy in ignorance. . .
And I tell you that I shall say nothing of what I know.

Jocasta has been silent for so long!

The frozen pose is broken; hands move along the loins, along the
buttocks, fingers clutch at shoulders, harsh breathing rasps
in our ears. Hold back, don't breathe, listen to his gasps,
or he, the other, listening to me, rapt in desire, holding back,
then holding back no more, exploding from the waiting, from
the listening.

A shiver, barely felt. Suspend my body, remove it from my mind

or yours, so that I can see it as another's.
Jocasta will think no more,
and you will go on loving. At last I can see myself with those eyes,
yours, that love me and desire me.
Imperceptible shivering, that brings me back
to the reality of our bodies, drawing apart
the better to rejoin.

No, don't leave! Don't withdraw! Not yet!

Once again, always, must Jocasta hold the Man who. . .

Don't speak, above all, don't interfere. She must know that
he can make his own decision to hold her close, to bite,
that his desire is her pleasure, her pleasure his desire.
She must learn, finally, that he cannot hold back,
that he yearns again and always for her lapping warmth,
her moisture making his desires increase.

She knows.

See, Oedipus, your mother is a woman!

Oedipus enters the room. From the ceiling, hanging from a beam,
a woman's body sways. A mother's body.
Black hair undone, hanging back, so long, so low
that its weight pulls her white, luminous face. Eyes
closed. Not sleep—one does not sleep when
hanging at the end of a rope attached to a beam
in the ceiling. The robe in disarray, one side hanging lower
than her feet. Turning slightly, as though moved by
some unknown breeze, but perhaps it's only the silent
breathing of the man standing before her, her son,
not daring to gaze upon her more.
One does not gaze upon one's mother when she is a woman.
One does not gaze upon a woman when she is one's mother.

There. Now Oedipus's face changes, expressing
his unbearable sorrow. Bloody sockets. Eternal
darkness.

I am Jocasta, but I am not yet hanged. And if the
Queen of Thebes decided *not* to kill herself? I am awaiting
my son, my husband, my lover, my king. Can he pass through
my body? No. I will be opaque, solid.
Jocasta's density/ wife-mother, full of milk,
sweat, heat, stickiness. Unavoidable. Or else
let her die.

Gouge out your eyes, Oedipus, just as you were at last
to see your mother. Gouge out your eyes! One cannot
see one's mother's body, right? Come. Keep your blinded
eyes, but don't cut off your hands, not yet. There are
no beams in the ceiling. No one is hanging from a rope,
not yet. Feel Jocasta's body, standing before you,
close to you. Feel Jocasta's hand unfastening her sash,
give me your hand, now.
Yes, touch my breasts, gently. . . part of this body,
this flesh taboo, forever banned.

You're trembling? I too, but never mind.
Your fingers in my hair, touching my open eyes, eyes
that watch you tremble and bleed. You're pale, Oedipus,
white as Thebes beneath the midday sun. You are afraid.
You, conqueror of the Sphinx, you who answered the
question. What animal. . . It is Man!

But I am a woman, woman, do you hear, the woman
from whose womb you came. Your mother, Oedipus.
No, don't draw back, stay here. My sash has fallen to the ground
and I am undoing my robe. I am naked
now. Since you can see nothing, you must hear. Now, you
will touch this flesh, for you know all its names.
But first, let me tell you that my breasts are those
of a woman, a woman in love. I take them in my hands and
the nipples harden, I tremble, I too, as much as you,
and my whole body yearns. . .

I am your mother, Oedipus.

My hands move down along my naked body,
because I *am* naked, Oedipus, remember that.
My hands meet at my sex, damp, swollen, you remember,
you loved the taste, the smell. It's still the same,
Oedipus, nothing has changed. You can still recognize all of me.

My name is Jocasta.